

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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American Life in Poetry: Column 724

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Liz Ahl was once a very talented graduate student in our creative writing program at The University of Nebraska, but she's long since moved on to teach at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. The following villanelle is from her handsomely printed chapbook entitled *A Thirst That's Partly Mine*, from Slapering Hol Press, in Sleepy Hollow, New York. Her most recent collection, *Beating the Bounds*, was published in 2017 by Hobblebush Books.

Aquarium, February

When ice outside makes daggers of the grass,
I come to where the tides of life still flow.
The water here still moves behind the glass.

In here, the seasons never seem to pass—
the sullen shark and rays still come and go.
Outside the ice makes daggers of the grass

and coats the roads. The meditative bass
won't puzzle how the blustery blizzards blow.
The water here still moves. Behind the glass,

rose-tinted corals house a teeming mass
of busy neon creatures who don't know
"outside." The ice makes daggers of the grass

and oily puddles into mirrors. Gas
freezes in its lines; my car won't go,
but water here still moves behind the glass.

No piles of valentines, no heart held fast—
just sea stars under lights kept soft and low.
Outside, the ice makes daggers of the grass;
in here, the water moves behind the glass.

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United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

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